DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 125 052 EA 008 377

AUTHOR Wiener, William K.
TITLE Measuring School Boundary Permeability: The P.S.C.Q. Revised.
PUB DATE 75
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the New England Educational Research Association (1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Definitions; Elementary Secondary Education; Models; *Organizational Climate; *Parent Attitudes; Parent Influence; *Parent School Relationship; *Questionnaires; *School Community Relationship; Statistical Surveys
IDENTIFIERS *Parent School Community Questionnaire

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the concept of school boundary permeability and describes the field testing and revision of the Parent-School Communities Questionnaire (PSCQ), a survey questionnaire designed to measure the permeability of school boundaries. The concept of permeability assumes that any social system, such as a school, is surrounded by a psychological boundary that insulates it from its environment. The degree to which this boundary is permeable to input from outside the system is directly proportional to the openness of the system. Originally, the PSCQ consisted of 50 descriptive statements that respondents were asked to rate on a five-point Likert-type scale. However, when the PSCQ was field tested by mailing it to a random sample of 500 parents from three elementary schools, respondents and school administrators agreed that the questionnaire was too long and repetitious. The PSCQ was revised on the basis of this feedback and shortened considerably. Comparison of PSCQ data with data from personal interviews with 60 parents showed close agreement between responses to the interview questions and responses to the PSCQ statements. (Author/JG)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED125052

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

MEASURING SCHOOL BOUNDARY PERMEABILITY:

THE P.S.C.Q. REVISED

by

William K. Wiener
Lenoir Rhyne College
Hickory, North Carolina

Paper prepared for presentation at the 1975 meeting of the New England Educational Research Association.

EA 008 377

A basic, but relatively unexplored area of study in school -- community relationships is concerned with the nature and permeability of the boundary lines that mark off a school from its constituent parent community. This paper deals with (1) a restatement of the conceptualization of what seem to be some factors that have the effect of being school-parent boundaries and (2) the revision of an instrument that qualifies the boundary line notion with regard to permeability: the ease with which the lines may be crossed.

Katz and Kahn (1967) elaborate on Lewin's (1951) concept of group boundary lines and their permeability. They suggest that a social system is surrounded by a psychological boundary insulating it from its environment. The degree to which this boundary is permeable to input from the environment of the social system is directly proportional to the openness of the system. Applying this concept to a school situation, an openness continum concerning parental input into the school might range from totally closed; i.e. a school where parents were completely isolated from interacting with school personnel on any matters, to completely open; i.e. a school where parents were totally free to enter any classroom at any time and interact with all school personnel. This continum may be applied to boundary permeability. The totally closed school suggests a solidification of system boundaries while the completely open school reflects extremely permeable boundaries.

An instrument designed to measure the permeability of the boundaries of a school was reported by Wiener and Blumberg (1973) in their description of the Parent-School Communities Questionnaire (PSCQ). The P.S.C.Q. consisted of fifty items to which respondents were asked to rate on a five point Likert-type scale ranging from "this is always true" to " this is never true." Each item was to be answered on the basis of what the respondents knew or felt to be the case at their child's school, whether or not they had any direct experience with a particular situation.

The original factor analysis of the P.S.C.Q. indicated that stements centered on the following dimensions:

1. Mechanical - Statements on this dimension concerned the process through which the parents made contact with school personnel. The mechanical questions elicited information as to the best way to contact school personnel, difficulties encountered in contacting a teacher or the principal, and the layers of the organization that must be penetrated before contact with the desired individual was made. Though the "mechanical" dimension by itself was not psychologically oriented, it was assumed that there was psychological fallout attached to it.

2. Outreach - These statements concerned the attempts by school personnel to contact parents. Questions dealt with the conditions surrounding a school-to-parent contact, perceptions about the parent-teacher organization, perceptions of the principal as a facilitator of parent input and parent-teacher problem solving.

3. Organizational Climate - This dimension contained statements concerning parental perceptions of the general character of the school organization. Questions elicited information about the atmosphere of the school and parent-teacher contacts, the perceived feelings of teachers toward parents and the ability of teachers to receive negative feedback.

The Organizational Climate dimension attempted to measure the parents' feelings about the total school organization, rather than their relationship with specific members of the organization.

4. Interpersonal Climate - Statements in this dimension were relevant to the quality and nature of parent-teacher interaction. These questions got at the parent's perception of the interpersonal atmosphere surrounding their contacts with school personnal; the feeling of the parent when contacted by the school, the degree of honesty or evasiveness of school personnel during the contact and the perceived attitude of school personnel toward parents.

Interpersonal Climate statements were designed to tap parental perceptions of their relationship with specific members of the school organization.

5. Influence - items on this dimension concerned the parent's perception of the impact of their relations with school personnel. Included were statements relevant to the amount of attention school personnel pay to parental input, response to group and individual input and the role of school personnel and parents in problem solving.

Subsequent field testing of the P.S.C.Q. took place in three medium-size (enrollment 650-to-1000) elementary schools; one in each of three suburban school districts in the Southeast.

A sample of five hundred parents were randomly selected from school registration cards of the three schools. Questionnaires were mailed to the prospective respondents along with comment cards to elicit feelings about the P.S.C.Q. concerning its length and pertinence of the statements.

Two hundred and seventy-eight questionnaires and one hundred and five comment cards were returned. A content analysis of respondents comments seemed to indicate that the P.S.C.Q. was too lengthy and that a number of statements seemed to be repetitive.

The results of the questionnaire were presented to the administrator of each of the schools. During a discussion of the results, each administrator echoed the parent comments concerning length and repetition and indicated that the P.S.C.Q. would become more useable if modifications were made.

The feedback from parents and administrators about the P.S.C.Q. prompted a second factor analysis based upon the two hundred and seventy-eight responses. The result of an orthogonal varimax rotation performed on the principal axis clusters yielded by the factor analysis of the instrument produced three salient dimensions. The criteria for acceptance of each item was set at .5000.

Thus, the following three factors emerged from the analysis:

Factor I - Teacher-Parent Interaction -

Items on this dimension tap the quality of interaction between parent and teacher as perceived by the respondent. Statments deal with perceptions of the teachers attitude toward parental contacts, their receptivity of negative

feedback, and the interpersonal climate of parent-teacher communications.

Following are the eight items composing the Teacher-Parent Interaction factor:

1. Teachers see parents as a nuisance.
2. Teachers seem threatened by parents who ask questions.
3. Teachers are friendly and warm in their communications with parents.
4. When I talk with my youngster's teacher, I feel he is holding back information I would like to have.
5. If I complain to a teacher about my youngster's negative reaction to his teaching, I am afraid that the teacher will act negatively toward my youngster.
6. Teachers seem to pay attention to parents.
7. After I have met with my youngster's teacher concerning a problem, the teacher contacts me with follow-up information about the situation.
8. Teachers in the school like parents to contact them about their child.

Factor II - Parent-Principal Interaction

This dimension contains statements concerning the quality of interaction between parents and the school administrator. Perceptions of how the principal views parent contacts and the parent organization, his receptiveness to negative feedback, and the climate of parent-principal encounters are measured by these items.

The following eight items are contained in the parent-principal interaction factor:

1. The principal takes the initiative in contacting parents about school matters.
2. The principal actively supports the parent organization.
3. The principal is willing to listen to negative things I have to say about what's going on in the school.

4. The principal sees parents as a source of help to him.
5. I trust the principal to communicate parental concerns to the teachers.
6. The principal only responds to pressure from a group of parents, not to an individual.
7. The principal encourages parents to contact teachers about their children's school activities.
8. The principal always pays attention to parents.

Factor III - Assessibility -

The items included in this factor concern the parents perception of the mechanics involved in making contact with the school. Statements dealt with the process used by parents to contact school personnel, the tone of school-to-home communications, and the impact the parent perceives he has on his child's teacher.

The Assessibility factor contains the following nine items:

1. In order for me to see my youngster's teacher, I need only stop in at the office without prior contact and ask.
2. In order for me to see the principal, I need only stop in at the office without prior contact and ask.
3. Most communications from the school are impersonal in tone.
4. If my youngster is having a problem in school, the best way to contact the teacher is in writing rather than by phone.
5. It is difficult to get in touch with a teacher on the phone.
6. My youngster's teacher contacts me personally when his work has been progressing particularly well.
7. I feel that when I talk with my youngster's teacher it makes an impact on him.
8. I have no hesitancy at all about contacting a teacher about my youngster's work in school.

9. I feel free to stop and chat with teachers in the school.

Scoring the P.S.C.Q. involves the computation of item means from the responses. These means may be plotted on a profile form to enable feedback to be given in an understandable graphic manner (figure I).

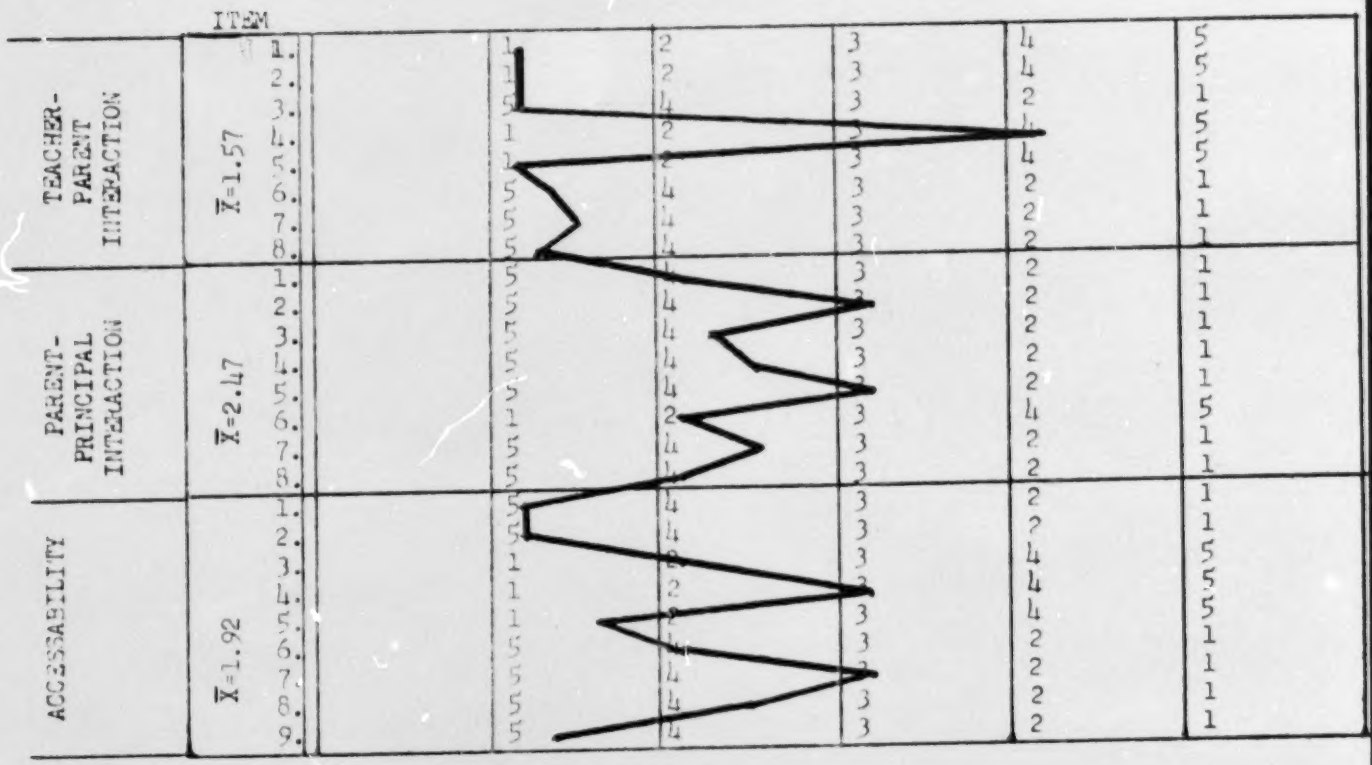
A possible way to interpret P.S.C.Q. results is through studying factor means and individual item responses. Computation of factor means is facilitated by a conversion of raw scores from the P.S.C.Q. to a common 1 (closed) to 5 (open) scale. Thus, the higher the score, the more open or permeable the boundaries on a specific dimension.

Using Hemphillville School (figure I) as an example, the P.S.C.Q. Profile indicates that parents seem to perceive the school as tending to be closed to their input. Hemphillville School was one of the schools that agreed to take part in the field testing of the revised instrument.

Hemphillville Elementary School seems to be isolated from parents whose children it serves. Although there seems to be some linkage between the school and the parent-community through the principal (P-P I mean = 2.47, P-P I - #2, #5). The individual parents attempt to make any impact on the school program or personnel are apparently ineffective (P-P I #6; A mean 1.92).

As informal visits to the school appear to be frowned upon (A #1, 2, 8), it seems best for a parent to contact a teacher through written note rather than by telephone (A #4, 5). When a parent does contact his child's teacher, the teacher does not seem to withhold information from the parent (T-P I #4), but these encounters apparently are perceived by the parent to be cold, impersonal and likely to have little impact (T-P I mean = 1.57; T-P I #2, 3, 6, 8). Parents seem to be quite hesitant about contacting their child's teacher (A #8), perhaps due to the feeling that such contact may have an adverse effect on the child (T-P I #5).

PARENT-SCHOOL-COMMUNITY PROFILE



Name of School Hemphillville Elementary School N= 125

District Fork County Unified

Date Jan. 15, 1975 Grade Level(s) 1-6

FIGURE I

School personnel at Hemphillville seem to perceive parental contacts as more hindrance than help (T-P I #1; P-P I #4) and place little value upon their input into the school (P-P I #8).

With little personal contact between parent and the school principal and staff, other than in cases when meetings with parents are essential, such as parent organization gatherings or conferences to discuss the child's progress (A #6), parents seem to view Hemphillville Elementary School as a place where they must send their children, and unquestionally accept its policies and practices.

The point that the permeability of the boundaries of a school is quantifiable (Wiener and Blumberg, 1973) seems to be underlined by the revised version of the P.S.C.Q. To provide an informal validity check of the instrument, a sample of sixty parents: ten from each of the six grade levels at Hemphillville, were selected from school registration cards for interviews. Parents who received the P.S.C.Q. were eliminated from the sample. Of the sixty attempted contacts, forty-four interviews were conducted.

The interview schedule was composed of three open-ended questions to correspond with the three P.S.C.Q. dimensions.

Interviewers were undergraduate students enrolled in a school-community relations course. They were instructed to funnel the respondent's answers to elicit specifics about their contact with the school. The interviewers were asked to characterize the parents perception of the permeability of the school on each dimension on a five point scale. During a six hour training period, interviewers used this scale to rate a series of four role-play interviewees. The interviewers averaged an eighty-four percent (84%) agreement on these scales.

Following the completion of the interviews, means for Hemphillville on each dimension were computed and compared with the P.S.C.Q. dimensional means for the school. As the interview - P.S.C.Q. comparison was intended to informally validate the instrument, any statistical description of this comparison would be open to

question. Thus, tests were not performed on this data.

However, it may be stated that an indicant of validity is mirrored by the fact that the instrument and interview dimensional means were in close agreement. (Table I)

Table I
Comparison of Instrument and Interview Means

	Instrument	Interview
Teacher-Parent Interaction	1.57	1.91
Parent-Principal Interaction	2.47	2.14
Accessibility	1.92	2.02

The potency of the P.S.C.Q. rests in its ability to provide school administrative personnel with a diagnostic tool for ascertaining parental perceptions of the school. Information gleaned from the instrument may be used as base-line data for structuring or improving school-community programs. For the administrator who strives to make his school open to parental input, the feedback from the P.S.C.Q. may highlight areas for staff development as well as provide him with information concerning the parents' perception of his performance.

In an era when schools may be said to be in a state of flux, with a variety of experimentation in staff patterns, curriculum, and instruction, a comparison of the results of periodic administrations of the P.S.C.Q. to a selection of the schools' parent population may be used as a gauge of the amount of parental input that should be taken into account in implementing change.

The revised version of the P.S.C.Q. simplifies the measurement of the permeability of the school's boundaries and seems to open some new areas for study in

the realm of the schools' relationship to its parent constituency. In addition to viewing the relationship of the parents' perception of the permeability of the boundaries of the school to such variables as parent satisfaction with school programs, demographic characteristics of the parent population and education values, a productive research extension of boundary permeability would be its application to the relationship between schools and their potential task-oriented concerns. For example, are schools relatively open or closed to supervision, staff development or new program ideas?

REFERENCES:

Katz, D. and Kahn R.L. The Social Psychology of Organizations. New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1967.

Wiener, W.K. and Blumberg, A. "The Parent-School Communications Questionnaire: A Measure of School Boundary Permeability." (Paper presented at the 1973 A.E.R.A. Convention.)